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Pershing, John Joseph

The Young Men's
Christian Association

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General Pershing
and the
Young Men's
Christian Association

An Address Delivered at
THE ANNUAL DINNER
OF
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE
New York City
May 10, 1921

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The Young Men's Christian Association

By GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING

I am particularly happy to have this opportunity of meeting with the representatives of this great Christian organization. In the last three-quarters of a century the influence of the Young Men's Christian Association has been extended practically to every corner of the globe. My own personal acquaintance with its endeavors has covered many years and many lands.

It was during the earlier period of our occupation of the Philippine Islands that I first met Dr. Mott, who even then had become a world figure, whose able direction and foresight gave impulse to others, and who because of his leadership, stands foremost today among thousands of able devotees to Young Men's Christian Association ideals. It was at a banquet in Manila on a very warm evening when Dr. Mott, speaking of the future of the Young Men's Christian Association, aroused his audience to a warmth that far surpassed that of the climate, with the result that there were eventually erected three splendid Young Men's Christian Association buildings—one for young Americans and two for the Filipinos themselves.

In the Island of Mindanao as early as 1903, a Young Men's Christian Association secretary followed the troops into the interior, and came to my headquarters with his tent and his newspapers and phonograph. Friendly Moros made frequent visits to my camp and on one occasion this secretary appeared among them

with his phonograph, and permitted several dattos to talk into the machine. Then with something of the air of the magician, he would wave the crowd back and grind out the words spoken by the Moro. Upon hearing their own voices reproduced, they were mystified and stood aghast as much as to say "There ain't no such darned thing." The Young Men's Christian Association secretary became very popular and freely went from place to place among these warlike people quite unmolested.

In China and Japan the influence for good has been immeasurably great. Under the direction of their wide-awake secretaries there has grown up a remarkable enthusiasm for physical development. The principal centers of Young Men's Christian Association control are alive with activity, and teams in the various sports meet as frequently as possible to compete internationally for honors. The result has been an extension of Young Men's Christian Association prestige that must have a marked effect not only upon the future of the individuals concerned, but upon the relations that the people whom they represent shall bear to each other. It all must lead to a better understanding and draw them and us closer and closer together in friendly intercourse as time goes on. This work richly deserves the unstinted support of all far-seeing Americans.

The early appearance of the Young Men's Christian Association with the Army was in the days when the soldier was rarely in the minds of our people. Luxury was unknown and none was expected, pay was meagre and the isolation at times became very irksome, so the Young Men's Christian Association worker was a wel-

come companion and his comfort gratefully received.

On the Border and in Mexico, the Association realized more than ever the opportunity to aid in affording the men of the service clean recreations. It provided reading rooms, clubs, games, lectures, movies, all of which served to keep them from the temptations that constantly follow in the wake of an army, or are found indigenous to the locality where the soldier's lot is so frequently cast.

The extension of Young Men's Christian Association work here in America has been very gratifying. There lies in the heart of every man a desire to live honorably among one's fellows, but humanity is not yet able to rise much higher than its environment. Where ennobling surroundings are absent those of another sort are found and in spite of the better instincts evil influences prevail. But we must not forget that the difficulties of reform are much greater than those of guidance. There are yet some 2,000 cities of over 5,000 inhabitants each in our own country which have not yet been reached by this Association. When we look around and see the wreck of nations, it makes us, or should make us, stop and consider our own condition, and I believe that there is no other organization quite so well fitted to meet the need of our young men in America as the Young Men's Christian Association. As a power in the development of good citizens not only among our native born but among the foreign born there is no agency that surpasses the Young Men's Christian Association. Here there opens up a large field of endeavor, wherein many of our own people need not only the spirit of Christianity but the spirit

of patriotism as well, which is, in fact, much the same thing. Instead of one million members of this Association in America there ought to be ten million.

It was in the World War that we came in closest touch with the organization. Your representatives were already in the field when our advance troops reached France. They were ready and anxious to be of every possible service. Supported by your patriotic membership here at home and under the leadership of that able administrator, Mr. Carter, the organization began to expand at once to meet our needs. We all had our hands very full in these trying days. The army had to be organized, and a great general staff had to be built up to handle the multitude of details as to plans of operations, supply and transportation. It was in the midst of these preparations that I called up Mr. Carter and asked the Young Men's Christian Association to take charge of the army canteens to follow our troops; he responded promptly and entered upon the work as a duty.

This placed the Young Men's Christian Association on a business basis, involving direct responsibility to the A. E. F. for an immense undertaking. They had to buy and sell without profit just as the army would have done. At first Mr. Carter's request for a certain allowance of tonnage was granted, but as time went on and our limited shipping became less and less able to carry our actual needs in war material, his quota of monthly tonnage was very much reduced even in the face of increasing demands. So through lack of transportation facilities, he was unable to provide the canteens with all they required. Furthermore, the per-

sonnel of the Young Men's Christian Association had to be expanded in almost the same proportion as the army, had to be organized to conduct this large business, which was only one of its numerous activities, with such untrained personnel as could be hastily mustered here at home.

All these things were a tremendous handicap, and when its work came to be compared with that of other welfare organizations operating with far less responsibility and covering only special areas, there arose some unjust criticism of which other organizations too often took advantage. But as a matter of fact this feature of the work of the Young Men's Christian Association deserves great praise, and I should like to express here in this presence my deep appreciation of the results obtained.

In the field of education, athletics and recreation after the Armistice the Young Men's Christian Association took the lead, without any sort of question, and as a matter of fact about nine-tenths of the welfare work that was carried on in the A. E. F. was carried on under the direction and guidance of the Young Men's Christian Association. Due largely to its efforts, our men were given opportunities for improvement, travel and entertainment that aided us materially in upholding the high standards of conduct always maintained in our forces abroad.

Finally, I wish to express the belief that this Association will continue to grow in usefulness to humanity, and will early become a universally recognized force in our national life against which the powers of evil may not prevail.

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